

For Immediate Release

Saturday, October 23, 2021

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Community Renewal Society Recognizes Champions of Social Justice During “Liberating Love”

Media interviews available upon request

Community Renewal Society (CRS) recognized and awarded champions of social justice during “[Liberating Love](#)”, the 139th Annual Membership Assembly held Saturday, October 23, 2021. Awards were presented in the following categories: John Purdy, Sr. Memorial Leadership Award, Partner Award, Rev. Dr. Yvonne V. Delk Courage Legacy Award, Legislative Lighthouse Award, and The City On A Hill Award.

Community Renewal Society was proud to recognize the following individuals, organizations and coalitions for their work in building social, racial and economic justice.

The John Purdy, Sr. Memorial Leadership Award was given to a person who embodies the meaning of justice and faith in action. Recipients of this award were Rev. Jason Coulter, Rev. Ronald Howell, Kim L. Hunt, and Lejia Johnson.

The John Purdy, Sr. Memorial Leadership Award recipient, **Rev. Jason W. Coulter** is a former member of the Community Renewal Society Board of Directors and Pastor of Ravenswood United Church of Christ, a vital and progressive community of faith whose mission statement is “Making God’s Love Visible!” Before entering the ministry, Rev. Coulter worked for thirteen years as a union organizer where he helped thousands of workers organize unions, including textile workers in North Carolina, warehouse workers in Indianapolis, and laundry workers in Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland. Rev. Coulter is the chair of the Chicago Metropolitan Association (UCC) Congregational Life Ministry Team and a leader in social justice organizing.

The John Purdy, Sr. Memorial Leadership Award recipient, **Rev. Ronald Howell** currently serves as Treasurer and Budget & Finance Committee Chairperson of the Community Renewal Society Board of Directors. Recently Rev. Howell, in collaboration with the full board, has led the charge to create a community investment initiative called The Community Impact Fund that will provide financial assistance and immediate impact to underserved communities with an urgent need. As an active leader with Community Renewal Society and in the community, Rev. Howell has served in multiple leadership roles on the board, including its Budget and Education Issue Teams. Still his most rewarding role is serving as a youth pastor and advocate with his congregation, across Chicago and all the way to Springfield pushing for legislation that will champion youth and not criminalize them.

The John Purdy, Sr. Memorial Leadership Award recipient, **Kim L. Hunt** is the Executive Director of Pride Action Tank, a project of AIDS Foundation Chicago. She drives the innovation, collaboration and learning necessary to make Pride Action Tank a leader in improving the health, safety and progress of individuals and groups within the LGBTQ+ community. We recognized Ms. Hunt for serving as a vital resource that helped connect CRS with policy coalition tables and for her resources in support of our [LGBTQIA+ platform](#). Additionally, Ms. Hunt served as the moderator of the powerful conversation during CRS’ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Faith in Action Assembly, which uplifted the life and legacy of Bayard Rustin and ushered in [CRS’ LGBTQIA+ Issue Area](#).

The John Purdy, Sr. Memorial Leadership Award recipient, **Lejia Johnson** currently serves as program director for McCormick Theological Seminary’s Solidarity Building Initiative for Liberative Carceral Education at the Cook County Jail and is a former board member of Community Renewal Society. Integrating her corporate experience, intrapreneurial ideation and project management skills with her commitment to public ministry and liberative education, as program director, she is a community connector, co-creating learning communities and collaborations

that tend to the whole of incarcerated learners and their communities. Ms. Johnson served as the chairperson for CRS's Restoring Rights Committee and advocated passionately PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) in Cook County Jail systems. She is a founding board member of Off the Pews organization that centers youth as the heart of its mission and an invaluable comrade for restoring rights across Chicago and the state of IL.

The Partner Award was presented to individuals or coalitions who embody extraordinary partnership in Community Renewal Society campaigns. The recipients of this award were The Empowering Community for Public Safety Coalition and the Coalition to End Money Bond.

In 2016, After the video of Laquan McDonald's murder was released, community organizations came together in response to the gross abuse of police power that Chicago was experiencing. Through joint efforts between the Grassroots Alliance for Police Accountability and Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Oppression, the Empowering Communities for Public Ordinance passed in the Chicago City Council on July 21, 2021. With this passage, Chicago is laying the foundation for the most democratic and transparent police department policy-making process anywhere in the country. This victory could not have occurred without the thousands of people who dedicated their time and effort to moving the campaign forward. We recognized the following organizations of the **Empowering Communities for Public Safety Coalition: CRS, Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA), Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), Target Area Development Corporation and Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Oppression.** Because of the incredible grassroots organizing that the ECPS coalition engaged in, we now have a civilian oversight commission that reflects the voice of the people.

Additionally, the Partner Award was granted to the **Coalition to End Money Bond** for their diligent work to pass the Pretrial Fairness Act. This bill ends money bond in Illinois and creates many other provisions that drastically reduce pretrial incarceration. We thank the organizations in this coalition for going above and beyond to identify and find solutions to end systemic pitfalls that entrap people through pretrial incarceration. The success of this act was due to the diversity of organizations and individuals who worked on this campaign: **ACLU Illinois, A Just Harvest, Believers Bail Out, Chicago Community Bond Fund, Community Renewal Society, Illinois Justice Project, Nehemiah Trinity Rising, The Next Movement, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty, S.O.U.L., and the Workers Center for Racial Justice.**

We also gave an honorable mention to **Malik Alim**, Advocate with the Chicago Community Bond Fund, who has passed in August 2021 but left a huge impact on the work of the Coalition to End Money Bond. We honored Malik and all he contributed to this work.

The Yvonne V. Delk Courage Legacy Award was given to a trailblazer, visionary and advocate for human rights displaying integrity and courage. Recipients of this award were Rev. Dr. Jorge Morales and Anjanette Young.

The Yvonne V. Delk Courage Legacy Award recipient, **Rev. Dr. Jorge Morales** is a former Community Renewal Society Board President. He has served as the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ Conference Minister and is one of the founders of San Lucas United Church of Christ on the west side of Chicago. Rev. Jorge Morales has been a constant voice for building bridges between Black and Brown communities across Chicago and a passionate voice for police accountability and reform. He is recognized as one of the founders of the original Rainbow Coalition in the city of Chicago. Rev. Dr. Morales has been a minister for over thirty years and while he is now retired, his legacy is longstanding and is to be celebrated. We recognize the impact he has made on Community Renewal Society and pay tribute to his leadership and service as a former Board Chair and as a lifelong Chicago freedom fighter.

On February 21, 2019, The Yvonne V. Delk Courage Legacy Award recipient, **Anjanette Young**, a social worker, endured a humiliating botched raid conducted by CPD and was left to stand naked while protesting, "you have the wrong house". Ms Young filed a lawsuit against the City of Chicago, which was dismissed, and her plight exposed the dangers and degradation of no knock raids. We are thankful Ms. Young is alive to tell her story. But we know

such raids can be fatal. We recognized Ms. Young for allowing the people's movement to use her story to push for deconstruction of policing, community oversight, and ultimately the passing of the Empowering Communities for Public Safety Ordinance in Chicago.

The Legislative Lighthouse Award recognizes a trailblazer and intentional legislative partner who has championed the issues affecting our communities. The recipient of this award was Senator Robert Peters.

Senator Robert Peters is a Democratic member of the Illinois Senate for the 13th district and the chair of the Illinois Senate Black Caucus. As a state senator, Peters plans to continue advocating for the people in his community and district to ensure they get the investment they need. Community Renewal Society honored Senator Robert Peters' extraordinary work around the SAFE-T Act, which passed the state legislature in January 2021. His work on LGBTQIA issues has demonstrated his commitment to lifting up the values that most closely align with Community Renewal Society. Because of Senator Peters' efforts, Illinois now has one of the most progressive and comprehensive laws around criminal legal reform that exists anywhere in the country.

The City on the Hill Award recognizes a church that has been at the forefront of our work, turning out to events and intentionally building power to move the CRS Platform for Renewal. Recipients of this award were Christ Universal Temple and McCormick Theological Seminary.

This year, we honored **Christ Universal Temple**. Christ Universal Temple is a New Thought Christian church, teaching people how to live better lives through the renewing of their minds. The Freedom Ministry of Christ Universal Temple is an integral part of their outreach to the community. They educate themselves and others in order to develop and assist in the implementing of new laws, policies and procedures to eliminate facts that create and perpetuate inequities in the criminal justice system. Since joining Community Renewal Society, this enthusiastic and dedicated congregation, led by Rev. Wells, has consistently engaged in our campaigns, showing up to press conferences, rallies and educating members of the community on the importance of our work. They serve as an exemplary model of what it means to live out the word of God.

McCormick Seminary shares this year's honor as one of our City on the Hill Award recipients. McCormick Seminary has been a progressive leader within the Reformed tradition committed to fostering a community of Christian leadership that serve diverse ministries and congregations in a challenging and complex world. Through academic excellence, critical reflection, and transforming witness, McCormick Theological Seminary uniquely equips excellent Church leaders for faithful, inclusive, and liberating ministries in God's world. The Solidarity Building Initiative for Liberative Carceral Education at Cook County Jail and its collaborative work with CRS around restoring rights for citizens who are incarcerated, center the voices of directly impacted individuals in the conversation about and our work in [Restoring Opportunities and Justice Reform](#).